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The Nature of Narrative Suspense and the Problem of Rereading

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This chapter attempts to give an account of the nature of narrative suspense and to explain why people read and enjoy suspense stories. It outlines an elaborated version of our structural-affect theory and shows how this theory deals with narrative suspense. The empirical literature on narrative suspense is reviewed, and I examine the degree to which this literature supports the elaborated structural-affect approach to suspense. The next sections of the chapter examine how various theories of story enjoyment deal with the problem of rereading narrative texts. Finally, I report the results of an experiment that examines the ability of the structural-affect theory to deal with the rereading of artificially constructed entertainment texts.

ENJOYMENT OF NARRATIVE SUSPENSE

Positive or Negative Affect?

The Random House Dictionary (1987) defines *suspense* as "a state or condition of mental uncertainty or excitement, as in awaiting a decision or outcome, usually accompanied by a degree of apprehension or anxiety" (p. 1917). This description of suspense leads to a serious paradox: Why would anyone read suspense stories for entertainment? Clearly, most people do not want to subject themselves to situations that lead to negative affective states such as apprehension or anxiety.

It must be the case that in some situations suspense can have a positive affective valence. This position is supported by other descriptions of suspense.

For example, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1986) gives a meaning for suspense that has positive valence: "pleasant excitement as to a decision or outcome" (p. 2303). Literary discussions of suspense have made the point more vividly. Barnet, Berman, and Burto (1971) described suspense as a "curious mixture of pain and pleasure" (p. 107). Bartholomew (1977) referred to the "delicious agony" of narrative suspense (p. 23) and Esenwein (1924) referred to the "sweet pain of anxiety" (p. 202). Thus, one important part of understanding the nature of narrative suspense is to give an account of the affectively positive aspects of suspense in fiction.

Positive Affective Valence in Nonnarrative Suspense

Psychologists interested in emotion, motivation, and affect have noted the "anomalous" positive valence of some forms of suspense. The problem is to account for the fact that children find the experience of falling very aversive, yet children frequently enjoy being thrown in the air and caught. Similarly, most adults would find the experience of losing their brakes while driving down a steep mountain road to be very aversive, yet the same individuals will pay to ride on a roller coaster. Researchers in this area have proposed two basic accounts for these phenomena.

Arousal Jag. One approach is to argue that a mild state of excitation followed by relief gives rise to a positive affect. Thus, Woodworth (1921) stated that for situations such as those already described, "The joy of escape more than pays for the momentary unpleasantness of fear" (p. 489). Berlyne (1960) stated that a positive valence is produced when "the drive is aroused to a moderate extent, and . . . the arousal is promptly followed by relief" (p. 198).

Arousal Boost. A second approach is to argue that mild forms of arousal can have an intrinsically positive valence. Hebb (1955) stated that "up to a certain point, threat and puzzle have positive motivating value, beyond that point negative value" (p. 250). Berlyne (1971) stated that one can have a "situation in which a moderate arousal increment is pursued because it is satisfying in itself, regardless of whether it is promptly reversed or not" (p. 136).

This review of theories of nonnarrative suspense gives us two accounts of situations in which suspense can have positive valence. In the next sections I examine the application of these accounts to the case of narrative suspense.

Why Feel Suspense for Fictional Characters?

In attempting to transfer the construct of suspense from the real world to the fictional world we immediately run into another paradox that was nicely stated in the title of an article by Radford and Weston (1975)—"How can we be moved

by the fate of Anna Karenina?" The problem is clear. In the nonfictional world, you feel emotions when you see other human beings placed in certain situations. Thus, most human beings would feel suspense if, during a flood, they watched the flood water rise toward a person stranded on a rooftop waiting for rescue. The difficulty is why one should feel suspense when reading about the same scene in a narrative in which one knows the character at risk is purely fictional.

Reader Involvement. It seems to me that to solve the puzzle of concern for fictional characters one must invoke some basic notion of involvement. It appears that when human beings read about a fictional world they can engage in a "willing suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge, 1817/1975, p. 169) and become absorbed in the events of the fictional world. A necessary condition for involvement in a fictional world is some degree of detail in the description of the events and characters of the fictional world. Thus, an abstract plot summary of a suspenseful novel can give the basic event sequence, yet it does not elicit an emotional response in the reader. A commonplace example of involvement with fictional worlds occurs in watching films. Almost everyone has had the experience of becoming deeply absorbed in a film and then having someone in the audience make a sound or movement that causes a momentary disengagement from the fictional world of the film and a shift to awareness of the actual world of the movie theater. The constructs of willing suspense of disbelief and reader involvement seem to me to provide an account of how the actions of fictional characters can give rise to actual emotions in the reader. However, one needs additional theoretical development in order to give an adequate account of the particular emotions a reader will feel.

Identification Theories. One very common approach to solving this problem is to postulate that the reader of fiction *identifies* with the character and thereby comes to feel the emotions that are being felt by the fictional character (cf. Zillmann, 1994, for a good review of this position).

Even though the identification theory is probably the most frequent solution to this problem, it suffers from severe difficulties. Both Carroll (1984) and Zillmann (1994) provided powerful critiques of the identification theory. In particular, they both note that the reader's affective state is frequently quite different from that of the character. For example, if the reader knows that the character's drink has poison in it, but the character is not aware of this fact, the reader feels suspense, but the character does not. Yet, under these circumstances, the identification theory would have to predict that the reader (who is identifying with the character) would feel no suspense.

Sympathy Theories. The other approach to the problem of predicting which emotions the reader will feel is to postulate that the reader feels emotions for fictional characters that are like those the reader would feel for nonfictional

individuals in similar circumstances. This view has the advantage that it does not necessarily predict that the reader and the character will be feeling the same emotions. If both the reader and the character are aware that the character is in danger then both should be feeling the same emotions. However, if the reader knows the character is in danger, but the character does not, the reader can feel suspense whereas the character is perfectly calm. Zillmann (1991, 1994) gives a careful discussion of these issues.

STRUCTURAL-AFFECT THEORY OF NARRATIVE SUSPENSE

Over a period of years at the University of Illinois we have been developing a structural-affect theory of story appreciation. In essence we have taken some of the constructs about the nature of affect from the work of Berlyne (1960, 1971), Hebb (1949), and Woodworth (1921) and applied them to the domain of narrative, using constructs taken from structuralist literary theorists such as Chatman (1978), Culler (1975), and Sternberg (1978).

We have examined our theoretical ideas with artificially constructed texts (Brewer, in press-a; Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1981), with short stories (Brewer, in press-b; Brewer & Ohtsuka, 1988a, 1988b), with fables (Dorfman & Brewer, 1994), with children's responses to texts (Jose & Brewer, 1984, 1990), and with cross-cultural data (Brewer, 1985).

In essence, the structural-affect theory relates particular structural features of narratives to particular affective responses in the reader and then relates the postulated structural/affective patterns to story liking.

Discourse and Event Structure

A core assumption in the structural-affect theory is that there is a distinction between the events that underlie a narrative and the linguistic presentation of these events in the narrative. This distinction was made explicit in the work of the Russian formalists (Erlich, 1980) and has continued to play an important role in structuralist accounts of narrative (e.g., Chatman, 1978; Sternberg, 1978). We refer to the organization of the events in the underlying event world as the *event structure*, and we refer to the temporal arrangement of these events in the narrative text as the *discourse structure*.

Common Entertainment Discourse Structures

We have hypothesized that three of the most important discourse structures used in entertainment stories are surprise structures, curiosity structures, and suspense structures. We assume that each of these structures is based on a different ar-

rangement of the discourse structure with respect to the underlying event structure and that each leads to a unique affective response in the reader. Figure 7.1 shows the basic event–discourse relationships and the postulated affective curves.

Surprise. We hypothesize that surprise is produced by including critical expository or event information early in the event structure, but omitting it from the discourse structure. By critical information we mean information that is required for the correct interpretation of the event sequence. Thus, in a surprise discourse structure, the author withholds the critical information from the initial

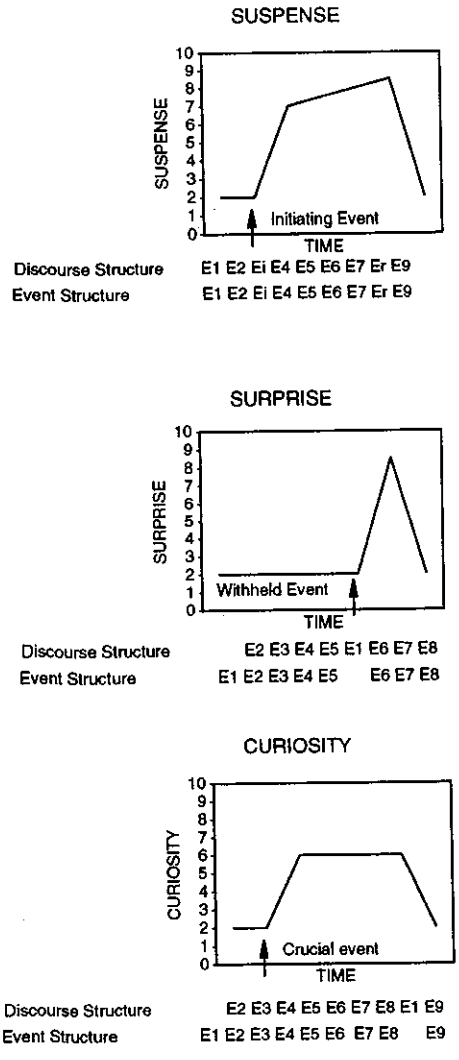

FIG. 7.1. The event–discourse relationships and postulated affect curves for three fundamental modes of discourse organization.

portions of the text and does not let the reader know that the information has been withheld. Then, later in the text, the author discloses the unexpected critical information, producing surprise in the reader and forcing the reader to provide a new interpretation of the events in the text.

For example, consider the following event structure:

1. ALFRED H. PUTS A BOMB UNDER A TABLE.
2. THREE MEN COME INTO THE ROOM.
3. THE MEN BEGIN PLAYING CARDS ON THE TABLE.
4. THE MEN TALK ABOUT THE WEATHER.
5. THE BOMB GOES OFF KILLING THE MEN.

A possible surprise discourse structure that could be constructed from this event structure would be:

2. *Three men came into the room.*
3. *The men began playing cards.*
4. *The men were talking about the weather.*
5. *A bomb under the table exploded killing the men.*

In this surprise narrative the author has deliberately not informed the reader that there was a bomb under the table, so when the bomb went off the reader should have been surprised and forced to rethink his or her assumption that the table in the room was just an ordinary table.

Curiosity. We hypothesize that curiosity is produced by including a crucial event early in the event structure. In a text with curiosity structure (unlike a surprise discourse) the discourse contains enough information about the earlier events to let the reader know that the information has been omitted from the discourse. This type of discourse organization causes the reader to become curious about the omitted information, and the curiosity is resolved by providing enough information later in the text to allow the reader to reconstruct the missing event.

A possible curiosity discourse structure that could be constructed from the bomb event structure given earlier would be:

5. *A bomb under a table exploded killing three men.*

Given this text we assume the reader will be curious about who the men were, why the bomb was planted, and who planted the bomb. In a traditional mystery story the remainder of the discourse might consist of having a detective try to

solve the mystery of who and why the bomb was planted (cf. Bennett, 1979, for a more detailed account of the structure of this genre).

Suspense. We hypothesize that suspense is produced by including an initiating event or situation in the underlying event structure. An *initiating event* is an event that has the potential to lead to a significant outcome (good or bad) for one of the main characters in the narrative. In addition, we hypothesize that the event structure must contain the outcome of the initiating event. In general, suspense discourse is organized with the initiating event early in the text and with considerable intervening material before the outcome is presented. The initiating event causes the reader to become concerned about the potential consequences for the character, the intervening material prolongs the suspense, and the eventual occurrence of the outcome resolves the suspense.

A possible suspense discourse structure that could be constructed from the bomb event structure would be:

1. *Alfred H. put a bomb under the table.*
2. *Three men came into the room.*
3. *The men began playing cards.*
4. *The men were talking about the weather.*
5. *The bomb under the table exploded killing the men.*

The initiating event was the placement of the bomb by Alfred H. This event had the potential to lead to a very significant outcome for the characters in the text. The initiating event comes early in the text, and so the reader should be in suspense about the outcome for the characters. The eventual explosion of the bomb brings to a close the events set in motion by the planting of the bomb and so should resolve the reader's suspense.

Suspense discourse structure differs from that of surprise and curiosity in one important respect. In order to produce the affects of surprise and curiosity, the discourse structure must diverge from the underlying event structure in the ways outlined. However, for suspense it is possible for the discourse structure to run completely parallel with the underlying event structure, as long as the text has an initiating event and a character for the reader to become concerned about. In actual suspense texts, authors frequently do not keep the discourse structure and event structure parallel. For example, authors of suspense texts often use flash-forwards to give hints of events yet to come in order to increase reader suspense (cf. Smiley, 1971; Sternberg, 1978). Brewer (1980), Sternberg (1978), and Ohtsuka and Brewer (1992) have provided additional discussions of techniques for arranging the discourse with respect to the underlying event structure.

One important technique available to authors is to decide whether to give the reader knowledge that the character does not have (cf. Friedman, 1955). Authors

of suspense texts often chose to give the reader knowledge of potential difficulties that the character does not know about in order to increase reader suspense.

Story Liking. In structural-affect theory the various discourse organizations are related to reader enjoyment. In particular we have hypothesized that readers will enjoy narratives with discourse structures that produce surprise and resolution, suspense and resolution, or curiosity and resolution.

Just World Organization. A crucial aspect of story content that must be considered in an overall theory of story liking is the interaction of character valence (good or bad character) and outcome resolution (positive or negative outcome for the character). Both Zillmann (1980) and Jose and Brewer (1984) proposed that adult readers will like texts in which good characters receive good outcomes and bad characters receive bad outcomes, but they will not like texts in which good characters receive bad outcomes and bad characters receive good outcomes. Jose and Brewer (1984) argued that this pattern of story preferences reflects a belief in a "just world" that derives from a more general sense of moral justice.

Hitchcock on Surprise and Suspense. One possible source of confirmation of theoretical accounts of the structure of entertainment genres is through the discussions of these issues by those who produce texts and films for a living. It is encouraging to discover that the theoretical accounts just given are completely consistent with those of one of the world's most skillful crafters of suspense—Alfred Hitchcock. In a famous interview with Truffaut (1967) Hitchcock discussed these issues and continued:

> We are now having a very innocent little chat. Let us suppose that there is a bomb underneath this table between us. Nothing happens, and then all of a sudden, "Boom!" There is an explosion. The public is surprised, but prior to this surprise, it has seen an absolutely ordinary scene of no special consequence. Now, let us take a suspense situation. The bomb is underneath the table and the public knows it. . . . In these conditions this same innocuous conversation becomes fascinating because the public is participating in the scene. The audience is longing to warn the characters on the screen: "You shouldn't be talking about such trivial matters. There's a bomb beneath you and it's about to explode!" In the first case we have given the public fifteen seconds of surprise at the moment of the explosion. In the second case we have provided them with fifteen minutes of suspense. (p. 52)

ELABORATED STRUCTURAL-AFFECT MODEL FOR SUSPENSE

For the purposes of the present chapter, I elaborate on some aspects of the structural-affect model as it applies to suspense.

Significant Outcome. We have asserted that the initiating event has to lead to a significant outcome. We made this assumption because we felt that events that led to insignificant outcomes did not tend to produce suspense. Thus, if a reader read a text in which the initiating event was that the main character's shoelace was weak, it seems unlikely that the reader would feel much suspense when they read that the character tied his shoe.

Positive or Negative Potential Outcomes. We have asserted that the potential outcome can be of either positive or negative valence. Bartholomew (1977) concluded that suspense results from potential negative outcomes and Zillmann (1980) made similar suggestions, although he was more ambivalent. It seems to us that an event sequence in which a character has the potential for winning a lottery is clearly capable of producing suspense, and so we retain the assumption that the potential outcome can be either positive or negative for the character. However, we agree with Zillmann (1980) that, in practice, the vast majority of suspense texts involve a potential negative outcome for the character.

Good Versus Bad Characters. Zillmann (1980) hypothesized that readers will not feel suspense for bad characters, whereas Klavan (1994) argued that one can build suspense for bad characters just as well as for good characters. I tend to agree with Alfred Hitchcock, who stated that one could build suspense for negative characters, but that the suspense would not be as strong as for a positive character in the same circumstances (Truffaut, 1967).

Outcome Likelihood. A number of writers have speculated about the relation of suspense to the reader's subjective estimate of the likelihood of a particular outcome. Bartholomew (1977), Vale (1973), and Vanderbilt (1991) all argued that suspense is maximum when the forces of good and evil are balanced so that the odds of a particular outcome are 50–50. Carroll (1984) suggested that maximum suspense will occur when the odds are either very high or very low for a good outcome. This is another issue on which I do not have strong opinions; however, if forced to take a position, I would disagree with these theorists and suggest that maximum suspense will occur when the odds of a good outcome are very low. This is clearly a topic that needs some empirical investigation.

There is a peculiar property for all of the odds given in the previous discussion. In most formulaic suspense genres it is required that good characters have good outcomes. Thus, in practice, the odds are always extremely high that a good character will come to a good outcome. Therefore, it would appear that all of the odds given are calculated under some form of willing suspension of disbelief, in which the reader (and the theorists) ignore this genre-based information and calculate the odds strictly within the world of the story. Zillmann's (1991) view is one exception to this general assumption. He hypothesized that suspense is maximum when the character is placed in a situation with a low probability of

a good outcome. However, he included the genre-based expectations in his calculations, so he stated that for standard formulaic texts the odds for a good outcome are very high. Therefore, he was forced to make the quite counterintuitive prediction that readers do not feel suspense while reading formulaic texts.

Character Sympathy. We have stated that when there is the potential for a significant outcome for a character, the reader must be concerned about the character in order for the reader to feel suspense for the character. On this issue we have clearly chosen to adopt a character sympathy approach and not a character identification approach. There are a number of good reasons to prefer the character sympathy approach. The one that has seemed decisive to us is that, in a suspense text in which the reader has been given information that the character has not, the reader's affect is frequently not the same as the character's affect (cf. Brewer, 1985; Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1982). Thus, the reader's affect is not identical to that of the character, as predicted by the identification theory, but tends to be similar to what a sympathetic individual would feel for a nonfictional person that the individual observed in those same circumstances.

Outcome Resolution. We have postulated that a successful suspense text must include the outcome of the initiating event. We made this assumption for two reasons. We thought that it was necessary for the suspense to be resolved in the discourse structure if the positive valence of suspense texts was going to be accounted for by Berlyne's arousal jag theory. In addition, many practical books on how to write suspense stories made strong arguments that successful suspense texts need a resolution. For example, Esenwein (1924) stated that "Readers still mentally threaten to pummel the author if the suspense is not satisfactorily relieved" (p. 202).

Mini Suspense and Resolution Episodes. In preparing this chapter it has become clear that there is one important aspect of our previous accounts of suspense that needs to be extended. We have always focused on the overall suspense and resolution curve for suspense (cf. Fig. 7.1). However, many of the authors of practical books on writing suspense stories have emphasized that to keep up reader suspense one needs a number of "mini" suspense and resolution episodes along the way, in addition to the macro suspense and resolution structure (cf. Bartholomew, 1977; Boulton, 1975, p. 53; Vanderbilt, 1991). Zillmann, Hay, and Bryant (1975) made a very similar argument to account for their empirical finding that children's liking of an unresolved suspense text increased with increasing degrees of suspense. Zillmann et al. noted that "Apparently, the suspense-resolution format applies not only, as a master plot, to the whole presentation but also to the smaller episodes of which the presentation is composed" (p. 322). Given these arguments it seems clear that the structural-affect account of suspense ought to be extended so that it includes mini suspense and resolution episodes (i.e., for longer texts the suspense curve in Fig. 7.1 ought to be "sawtoothed").

EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES OF SUSPENSE

As the preceding sections show, there has been much theoretical discussion of suspense and of suspense texts. Even though most of the hypotheses that have been proposed in this literature are open to experimental investigation, in practice, there have only been a modest number of empirical studies of these issues.

Significant Events. Brewer and Lichtenstein (1981) used experimentally constructed texts to examine the issue of whether significant events lead to suspense. In that study we had subjects read two texts (e.g., about a man driving home from work) that were identical except that one text also included an initiating event (a bomb with a timer had been planted in the man's car). As subjects read the texts, they were stopped at fixed points and asked to make a series of affect judgments. The data showed that the inclusion of significant events led to a strong rise in rated suspense.

Positive Outcomes. Brewer and Lichtenstein (1981) also provided data that make it possible to examine the issue of whether suspense can be produced when the potential significant event has a positive valence. Two of the texts used in the Brewer and Lichtenstein study used potential negative outcomes for the character (bomb in car, approaching tidal wave), and one used a potential positive outcome (finding a sweepstakes ticket worth $100,000). Examination of the rated suspense data show that all three texts (including the one with a potential positive outcome) produced high levels of rated suspense.

Good Versus Bad Characters. Jose and Brewer (1984) studied children's responses to suspense stories. We experimentally manipulated character valence (good vs. bad) in the texts used in this study and found that the children rated both forms of the stories as producing suspense, but that the suspense texts with good characters showed reliably higher amounts of suspense.

Character Sympathy. All of the suspense texts used in Brewer and Lichtenstein (1981) were designed so that information about the significant event was provided to the readers early in the text, but the character did not become aware of the significant event until the resolution at the very end of the text. Therefore, the fact that the readers provided high suspense ratings for the portions of these texts before the character was aware of the significant event shows that reader affect can be quite different from character affect in suspense texts.

Outcome Resolution. Zillmann, Hay, and Bryant (1975) studied children's responses to a television presentation of a suspense discourse structure (attack by a wild lion). They used various measures of physiological arousal (e.g., skin temperature, heart rate) and found that these physiological measures of arousal

showed a drop right after the segment of the program that provided a resolution of the initiating event (shooting of the lion). Brewer and Lichtenstein (1981) measured reader suspense before and after the presentation of the outcome of the significant event in suspense texts. In the segment of text right after the outcome there was a dramatic drop in rated suspense that reduced suspense almost to the original base level.

Story Liking: Arousal Boost. Zillmann, Hay, and Bryant (1975) found that television programs without clear resolution that were constructed to produce higher suspense also produced higher liking ratings. Brewer and Lichtenstein (1981) examined story liking for texts with an initiating event but no resolution and for texts without an initiating event (i.e., control texts). The texts with unresolved suspense were given higher liking ratings than were the control texts. Brewer and Ohtsuka (1988a) had readers (from the United States) read a set of American and Hungarian short stories and rate them at fixed points. We carried out correlational studies and found that overall suspense rating had the highest correlation with overall story liking. Thus the data seem to support Berlyne's (1971) arousal boost hypothesis as applied to narrative suspense.

Story Liking: Arousal Jag. Zillmann, Hay, and Bryant (1975) found that experimentally produced television programs with clearly resolved outcomes were liked better than programs with less clearly resolved outcomes. Brewer and Lichtenstein (1981) examined story liking for texts with an initiating event and resolution (i.e., suspense discourse structures) and for texts without an initiating event (i.e., control texts). The texts with a resolved suspense discourse structure were given considerably higher liking ratings than were the control texts. Brewer and Ohtsuka's (1988a) study of American and Hungarian short stories showed that story liking was reliably correlated with story completeness (i.e., story resolution). These studies provide support for Berlyne's (1960) arousal jag theory as applied to narrative suspense.

Mini Suspense and Resolution Episodes. As discussed earlier, Zillmann, Hay, and Bryant (1975) found that unresolved suspense television programs with higher suspense showed higher liking ratings. They were not expecting this finding and suggested that it might have occurred because their television programs had smaller elements of suspense and resolution imposed on the macro suspense and resolution structure. Gerrig and Bernardo (1994) carried out an experiment using modified texts from a James Bond novel. In Experiment 1 they compared one version in which Bond tries to hide his fountain pen, but is unsuccessful, with a version in which this episode is omitted. The version in which Bond tried and failed to hide his pen showed reliably higher ratings of suspense than did the other version. Gerrig and Bernardo interpreted these results as supporting their hypothesis that suspense is produced when the reader believes

"that the quantity or quality of paths through the hero's problem space has become diminished" (p. 460). It seems to me that this finding might be better interpreted as showing that mini suspense and resolution episodes can increase overall narrative suspense.

Conclusion. Although there has only been a limited amount of empirical work in this area, the research that has been done tends to provide considerable support for the major components of the structural-affect model of suspense. The data support the hypothesis that suspense is produced by having an initiating event in the discourse that has the potential to lead to significant outcome for one of the characters. The data support the view that suspense can be produced by events that have the potential for either good or bad outcomes and that suspense can be produced when either good or bad characters are at risk, although higher suspense is produced when there is the potential for a bad outcome for a good character. The data show that when the outcome of the initiating event is given in the discourse suspense drops. Finally, the data show that both the simple occurrence of suspense and the occurrence of resolved suspense lead to higher story liking.

THE PROBLEM OF REREADING FOR THEORIES OF SUSPENSE

The issue of rereading is a significant problem for theories of story enjoyment. The data are simple. Many readers will reread a book for a second time (cf. Smith, 1985). Yet, this simple fact provides serious constraints on theories of suspense. In this section of the chapter, I review a number of theories of rereading and work out the implications of these theories for the topic of narrative suspense.

Uncertainty Theories. Many theories of suspense assume that suspense derives from psychological uncertainty. For example, one important recent discussion of psychological theories of emotions (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988) states that suspense involves a "Hope emotion and Fear emotion coupled with the cognitive state of uncertainty" (p. 131). Kintsch's (1980) theory of what makes a text interesting is an example of this approach applied to stories. Kintsch stated that "Interest in a story derives mainly from the unpredictable but well motivated turn of events; conflicting expectations are aroused in the reader about where it is all going and what will happen next" (p. 89).

Uncertainty theories make a clear prediction about rereading. On a second reading, the reader will know what is going to happen next; therefore there will be little uncertainty. If there is little uncertainty there will be little affect, and so rereading should not occur. Thus, these theories are descriptively inadequate to account for rereading.

Willing Suspension of Memory (Voluntary Amnesia). Another approach to the problem of rereading is to adopt the uncertainty approach to story affect, but then invoke a special form of suspension of disbelief in which it is hypothesized that the reader ignores information gained during the first reading during subsequent readings. For example, Walton (1978) described the case of a child hearing a text for a second time and argued that "She is engaged in her own game of make-believe during the reading, a game in which make-believedly she learns for the first time about Jack and the giant as she hears about them" (p. 26).

De Beaugrande and Colby (1979) also appear to hold a form of this theory. They stated that during subsequent readings the reader "must at every narration, compute the consequences of actions and reactions all over again. At turning points, audiences keep reconstructing the alternative disastrous states that the tracks inherently tend to lead toward, even though those states will not be attained" (p. 50).

Gerrig (1989) also appears to adopt a variation on the amnesia theory. He stated that "we have incorporated an *expectation of uniqueness* into the cognitive processes that guide our experience of the world" (p. 279). He noted that rereading a text violates this expectation, but that the reader ignores the information obtained from the previous reading and maintains "an unfailing expectation of uniqueness" (p. 279).

The theories that postulate some form of amnesia about the earlier readings make just the opposite prediction about the consequences of rereading from that made by the uncertainty theories. The theories based on the willing suspension of memory about the earlier readings predict that readers should enjoy rereading just as much as the original reading because there should be no change in the reader's affect produced by the later readings. (Publishers may not like this theory much because it also implies that one could be quite content with owning just one very suspenseful book!)

Shift of Motivation Theories. The next type of theory is frequently held by theorists who have strong opinions about the differences between entertainment fiction and true literature. These theorists often accept an uncertainty view for first readings, but account for the rereadings of *literary* texts by postulating that other motivations come into play with later readings. For example, Allen (1986) stated, "It is characteristic of literary interest, interest in the work itself rather than in vicarious emotional involvement, that one wishes to read again and that works written with literary merit bear second and third readings, whereas those written only to produce vicarious feelings (thrillers, popular romances) do not" (pp. 64–65). Perrine (1959) proposed a similar view. He assumed some form of uncertainty theory for popular entertainment fiction. For example, he stated "If we know ahead of time exactly what is going to happen in a story, and why, there can be no suspense" (p. 64). However, he stated that a good interpretive story "should be as good or better on a second or third encounter—

when we already know what is going to happen—as on the first" (p. 64). He stated that on the later readings the reader obtains satisfaction from the fact that the characters are interesting or that the story is "morally penetrating."

Lever (n.d.) gave a very clear version of this type of theory. She stated, "A good novel needs and deserves re-reading; a bad novel cannot be re-read. Re-reading of a novel is thus a sound test of quality. . . . If the novel is good, we do not miss the suspense of not knowing what is to happen next" (p. 50). She concluded that during a rereading, "We are not hurried along by curiosity and thus have more inclination to observe details. These details now carry a significance we could not note at the time" (p. 51).

The shift of motivation theories make the clear prediction that people will reread literary fiction but not popular entertainment fiction. Because many people do reread popular fiction, this class of theories is descriptively inadequate.

Modes of Reading. C. S. Lewis (1947) proposed a theory similar to the shift of motivation theory except that he applied it to different types of readers instead of different types of genres. He noted that some readers read primarily for excitement, which he defined as "the alternate tension and appeasement of imagined anxiety" (p. 93). He stated that "excitement . . . is just what must disappear from a second reading" (p. 102). He proposed that "We do not enjoy a story fully at the first reading. Not till the curiosity, the sheer narrative lust, has been given its sop and laid asleep, are we at leisure to savour the real beauties" (p. 103). He noted that other readers read the same texts for the atmosphere and the imagination and that the way to distinguish the two types of readers is that those who read for excitement will not reread texts, whereas those who read for atmosphere and imagination will engage in multiple readings.

This theory makes a strong individual difference prediction, hypothesizing that some readers will reread and some will not, and that the two types of readers will show different affective states during both first and second readings.

Character Identification. Another common approach to story enjoyment is to postulate that the reader's affective states are derived by his or her identification with one or more of the characters in the fictional world (see Zillmann, 1994, for a review of these theories). In general, character identification theories will predict no change in reader affect and enjoyment during rereading, because the characters' circumstances and emotions will remain constant on a second reading. Thus, these theories, like the willing suspense of memory theories, predict that there should be no change in the reader's affect with repeated readings.

Vicarious Doubt. Lipsky (1956) developed a somewhat more sophisticated version of identification theory. He stated that "emotional identification is the basic thing on which storytelling depends" (p. 108). He made a distinction between real doubt (i.e., uncertainty) and vicarious doubt. He asserted that

suspense is based on the reader experiencing vicarious doubt, which he defined as "doubt shared by the reader with the fictional actor as to the outcome of the fictional intention. This sharing of doubt arises through emotional identification of the reader with the fictional actor" (pp. 107–108).

Lipsky made the explicit prediction (p. 107) that with rereading, actual doubt is eliminated but vicarious doubt remains and so some suspense is retained during rereading. Thus, this theory gives an account of why readers might engage in rereading.

Memory–Forgetting. Most of the theories of rereading already discussed assume that the reader has retained all the information gathered from the first readings. However, in real life I suspect that most rereading occurs after a period of time, so considerable forgetting should occur. Under these circumstances, all of these theories would predict that after a period of time rereading could occur, based on the particular mechanisms postulated to account for suspense on a first reading.

Memory–Capacity Limitations. Another aspect of human memory could also play a role in rereading. It seems obvious that readers simply cannot retain all the information in a book after a first reading. Therefore any information that was not retained could play its expected role in producing suspense on a second reading. Boulton (1975) made this point. She asked, "Does even an experienced reader ever take in a novel as a whole?" (p. 47) and concluded that, "This imperfection in our response is of course one reason why it is worth while to read a book, hear a symphony, or gaze at a painting more than once; but we may never exhaust it" (p. 47). The memory capacity theory would predict the occurrence of rereading, but with reduced suspense on a second reading.

Memory–How. Another variation on the memory capacity hypothesis is to argue that after a single reading one may recall basic elements of the plot such as the outcome, but not the details of *how* the outcome was achieved. Thus, one could postulate that rereadings lose some affect due to the recall of the outcome, but that rereading information about the details of how the outcome was achieved will still produce enough suspense to produce enjoyment on a second reading.

Armstrong (1977) seems to hold this position. She stated, "A good suspense story operates, even though you've read the book before. So curious is the suspension in which he is held, the reader can know exactly how it all comes about and still be caught up in the razzle-dazzle of the proceedings" (p. 13).

De Beaugrande and Colby (1979) also appear to have adopted this approach as one way to account for rereading. They stated that:

> Interest is upheld during repetitions of the same narrative because the audience predicts only global data, and rediscovers local data each time. It would follow that enduring narratives—and perhaps art objects of all kinds—manifest inherent structural complexities whose processing demands, even after repeated exposure, remain above a certain threshold of cognitive storage abilities. (p. 49)

STRUCTURAL-AFFECT THEORY AND REREADING

This section of the chapter works out the implications of rereading for the structural-affect theory. Our theory is more complex than most of the theories of suspense discussed earlier. As noted earlier, the structural-affect theory assumes a discourse–event distinction and postulates three different discourse organizations associated with three different affective states. Therefore the phenomena of rereading provide a severe test for our theory.

Event–Discourse Relation Unchanged. One possible approach is to apply the suspension of disbelief hypothesis to the structural-affect theory. This approach would assert that the information about the discourse structure and the event structure gained in the first reading has no impact on subsequent readings. Thus, this hypothesis predicts no change in the levels or types of affect on a second reading.

Events Only. Another possible approach is to assume that on a second reading the reader responds to the text with the full knowledge of the underlying events that were obtained from the first reading. This hypothesis makes some rather interesting predictions. It predicts that curiosity should be essentially eliminated during second readings because the reader knows the true state of affairs and should no longer be curious about the outcome (e.g., the reader now knows how and why Alfred H. hid the bomb under the table).

The prediction for suspense texts is more subtle. If suspense is assumed to be based on reader uncertainty then it should be eliminated on a second reading because the reader will no longer be uncertain about the underlying event sequence. However, if suspense is based on the reader's concern for the plight of the character, then it should show little or no reduction during a rereading.

The events-only hypothesis predicts that surprise will be eliminated on a second reading because the reader knows the actual state of affairs in the event structure. However, it also makes the prediction that in many cases there will be a *qualitative shift* in the type of affect felt during the rereading of a surprise story. Consider Hitchcock's bomb example. There is a bomb underneath the table (a fact unknown to both the reader and the characters) and it goes off during the innocent card game. According to the structural-affect theory, on a first reading, this should lead to surprise. However, on a second reading, the events-only hypothesis predicts that the readers will not be surprised because they now know the bomb is under the table. However, during this second reading they should feel suspense as the

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characters carry on their everyday conversation about the weather because the readers now know that there is potential danger for the characters.

REREADING EXPERIMENT

This section of the chapter gives a preliminary report on data from a study of rereading carried out by Edward Lichtenstein and myself.

Method

The texts used in this experiment were similar to those used in Brewer and Lichtenstein (1981). There were three texts, all using the same set of underlying events. One text was arranged in suspense form, one arranged in surprise form, and one was a base form that did not include an initiating event. The initiating event early in the suspense texts let the reader know that the character was at risk, but the character was not aware of the risk until the outcome at the end of the text. Subjects were asked to read a text and then at fixed points were asked to make a series of affect judgments. Subjects carried out a brief filler task and then were given back their original booklet and asked to reread the text and make new affect judgments.

Results

On first reading the suspense texts showed an initial high level of suspense with a strong drop in the text segment containing the outcome (replicating the findings of Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1981). On second reading there was a strong overall reduction in the suspense ratings, but not quite down to the level of the base narrative.

On first reading the surprise texts showed an initial low level of surprise with a sharp rise in the text segment in which the crucial information was given (replicating the findings of Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1981). On second reading the surprise was reduced to the level of the base narrative. However, on the suspense scale the surprise narrative showed an initial small rise above the base level, with a drop below the base narrative on the text segment that contained the crucial information.

IMPLICATION OF REREADING DATA FOR THEORIES OF NARRATIVE SUSPENSE

Story theories based on suspension of disbelief predict no change in affect with rereading. The data showing strong reduction in suspense and surprise with rereading provide severe problems for this class of theories.

Story theories based on identification of the reader with the character's emotion also predict no change in affect with rereading. The data showing strong reduction

in suspense and surprise with rereading thus also provide severe problems for this class of theories. In addition, the identification theories cannot account for the initial rise in suspense for the suspense texts on first reading. In the initial segments of the suspense text, the character is not in suspense, yet the readers who know that the character is in peril report high levels of suspense.

Overall, the structural-affect theory fares considerably better. The theory provides a good account of the shape of the surprise ratings on first reading and their severe drop on second reading. The theory gives a good account of the shape of the suspense ratings on first reading. The finding that the suspense ratings on second reading show a strong, but not complete drop can be accounted for by adopting the memory limitations theory and assuming that our subjects were not able to recall every detail of our texts on a second reading. It could also be accounted for by a variation on Lipsky's (1956) hypothesis, in which reader suspense is postulated to be a combination of uncertainty about outcome (which drops with rereading) plus concern about outcome (which does not drop with rereading).

Our experiment was deliberately designed to be a very extreme form of rereading. By giving the subjects back their original booklet we set up the situation so that the subjects had to know that all of the information in the discourse was going to be repeated exactly as they had seen it before, so there was no possible uncertainty. In addition we used short simple texts so the memory load was minimal.

With more complex texts (e.g., those containing rich characterization and descriptions) it seems likely that the memory capacity hypothesis might come to play a stronger role in rereading. Similarly, with longer time intervals one might expect that the memory forgetting hypothesis might come to play a more important role in producing reader suspense during rereading. The structural-affect theory can be used to make a number of predictions about the rereading of natural texts (e.g., readers will be more likely to reread suspense stories than surprise stories). All of these issues remain to be tested.

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